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UNCLAS COLOMBO 001732

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

AIDAC

DEPT. FOR DCHA/OFDA

MANILA FOR REGIONAL DISASTER ADVISOR

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [NONE](#)

SUBJECT: DROUGHT CONDITIONS PERSIST IN SRI LANKA'S  
SOUTHEASTERN DRY ZONE

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED -- PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

1. (U) ON SEPTEMBER 6, 2002, USAID OFFICIALS ATTENDED AN EMERGENCY-PREPAREDNESS MEETING CONVENED BY THE CONSORTIUM OF HUMANITARIAN AGENCIES IN COLOMBO. THIS RESULTED IN AN EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION REGARDING THE DROUGHT-LIKE CONDITIONS CONTINUING TO AFFECT THE SOUTHERN DRY ZONE OF SRI LANKA. THE MEETING WAS CHAIRED BY THE LOCAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF RED CROSS/CRESCENT SOCIETIES (IFRC); ALSO ATTENDING WERE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE UNITED NATIONS, INTERNATIONAL AND LOCAL NGOS, AND THE NORWEGIAN AGENCY FOR DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION (NORAD).

2. (U) A CONSENSUS WAS REACHED THAT ALTHOUGH RAINFALL IN THE HAMBANTOTA AND MONERAGALA DISTRICTS CONTINUES TO BE BE SCANT, CONSTRAINING DRINKING WATER SUPPLIES AND IRRIGATED AGRICULTURE, THE SITUATION AT PRESENT DOES NOT CONSTITUTE AN EMERGENCY. THIS IS UNDERSCORED BY THE ABSENCE TO DATE OF A FORMAL REQUEST FOR RELIEF ASSISTANCE BY THE GOVERNMENT OF SRI LANKA.

3. (SBU) INDIVIDUAL MINISTERS WITH STRONG POLITICAL TIES TO THE REGION HAVE HOWEVER APPEALED TO VARIOUS DONORS, INCLUDING USAID, FOR FUNDING OF RELATED PROJECTS IN DROUGHT-AFFECTED PARTS OF THEIR CONSTITUENCIES.

4. (U) USAID OFFICIALS CARRIED OUT A VISIT TO THE REGION FROM AUGUST 11-14, 2002, TO CONDUCT A RISK-POTENTIAL ASSESSMENT AND MONITOR THE EFFICACY OF DROUGHT RELIEF ASSISTANCE MADE AVAILABLE IN 2001. SAVE THE CHILDREN FUND (UK) (SCF/UK) RECEIVED A \$25,000 DISASTER ASSISTANCE GRANT PURSUANT TO THE AMBASSADOR'S DISASTER DECLARATION OF SEPTEMBER 6, 2001. THE FUNDS WERE USED TO PURCHASE WATER BOWSERS, STORAGE TANKS AND PORTABLE CONTAINERS TO PROVIDE CLEAN DRINKING WATER SUPPLIES IN HAMBANTOTA AND MONERAGALA. BASED ON FIRST-HAND INFORMATION OBTAINED FROM RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS AND RESIDENTS OF AFFECTED AREAS, USAID OFFICIALS CONCLUDED THAT THE ASSISTANCE WAS BEING USED APPROPRIATELY TO MITIGATE EFFECTS OF PERSISTENT DROUGHT-LIKE CONDITIONS IN THE AREA.

5. (U) USAID OFFICIALS ALSO CONCLUDED, HOWEVER, THAT LACK OF RAINFALL HAS CONTINUED TO SEVERELY LIMIT ACCESS TO POTABLE WATER FOR MANY LOCAL RESIDENTS AND LIKEWISE CONSTRAINED THE WATER-INTENSIVE AGRICULTURE -- PRIMARILY PADDY FARMING -- PREDOMINANT IN THE REGION. PERSISTENCE OF DROUGHT-LIKE CONDITIONS IN SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER, MONTHS DURING WHICH TYPICAL RAINFALL IS RELATIVELY HIGH, WILL UNDOUBTEDLY EXACERBATE THESE PROBLEMS.

6. (U) USAID/SRI LANKA CONTINUES TO MONITOR THE SITUATION IN CLOSE CONSULTATION WITH NGO PARTNERS INVOLVED IN THE AFFECTED REGION, UN AGENCIES AND OTHER DONORS. THE MISSION IS PREPARED TO DISPATCH A TEAM FOR ADDITIONAL ASSESSMENT SHOULD EXPECTED RAINS FAIL LATER THIS MONTH. WE MAY REQUEST TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FROM OFDA'S REGIONAL DISASTER ADVISOR IN CONDUCTING THIS ASSESSMENT.

AMSELEM